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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000203

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: REGIME PRESENTS EVIDENCE ON POLITICAL ARRESTS

REF: RANGOON 185

Classified By: CDA, a.i., RON MCMULLEN FOR REASON 1.5(D).

[11.](#) (C) Summary: The SPDC presented its evidence against political activists arrested over the last month in a February 10 press conference. The activists were allegedly conspiring with "insurgent and terrorist" groups in Thailand. While one of those arrested was allegedly planning some explosions, the rest were reportedly only guilty of attempting to distribute leaflets against the regime and planning protests. The regime issued a statement on February 13 complimenting "the vast majority" of political figures in the country who are not acting outside the law. The NLD told Emboffs that while it had no specific knowledge of the alleged actions of the NLD members among those arrested, it did not doubt that they may have connections with exile groups. The arrests obviously serve as a warning that political activities are still very closely monitored and that any criticism of the regime will be dealt with harshly. End Summary.

[12.](#) (U) On February 11, the state-controlled newspaper, "The New Light of Myanmar," provided a detailed account of a February 10 Ministry of Defense news conference on recent arrests of political activists. The purpose of the news conference was to provide information on "the anti-government activities perpetrated by expatriate NLD terrorist insurgents and NCGUB in cooperation with some members of the NLD and SNLD parties within the country." It also claimed that the All Burma Democratic Student Front (ABSDF) played a role in the activities.

[13.](#) (U) The evidence presented against the activists was a rambling, often incoherent description of trips various individuals made between the border area and Rangoon, training in insurgent camps in Thailand, transfers of funds, Xeroxing of anti-government pamphlets, and "causing unrest." The most serious charges, of planning to cause explosions, were leveled at a Thet Nwe, alias Nyein Lu, who was reportedly sent by the expatriate NLD and ABSDF in Thailand. The offenses of the rest of those arrested revolved around political organizing activities of a Maung Maung Aye, who was reportedly planning to stage two protests in Rangoon in April.

[14.](#) (U) In justifying the crackdown, the regime spokesperson at the press conference said that "during the transitional period, the government wants to see stable, peaceful and disciplined political movement. Holding the attitudes and thoughts of 88, some politicians found weaknesses and faults with the government and the Tatmadaw, exaggerated them and caused unrest. It was found that they committed destructive acts after contacting with unlawful groups secretly and receiving assistance from them. Such acts are to be exposed."

[15.](#) (U) On February 13, the SPDC Information Committee issued a statement that the regime appreciated "the vast majority" of political figures in Burma that are working toward transition peacefully and by legal means. Noting that the government is laying a foundation of peace and stability and ensuring that all 10 political parties in Burma may act freely and without interference within the framework of the law, it said the government regretted when some members of political parties acted in violation of their own party's regulations and deliberately broke national laws. It noted that "these individuals will, of course, be tried fairly in a court of law, and are considered innocent until proven guilty."

[16.](#) (C) NLD Spokesperson U Lwin and Aung San Suu Kyi have told embassy officers that while the NLD had no direct knowledge of the alleged actions of the NLD members implicated in the arrests, they did not doubt that the charges may be at least partly true. They said that while the NLD tries to maintain tight party discipline precisely to avoid any activities the regime may deem illegal, some members probably do have contacts with exile groups (in itself an illegal act), and may take more risks as a result. U Lwin cited an incident about two months ago when military intelligence called him complaining bitterly that someone had placed NLD flags along the entire length of the historic U

Bein footbridge near Mandalay (an incident not noted in the recent arrests). U Lwin said he honestly had no idea who had done this but he sent word to the Mandalay NLD office that MI was threatening to make arrests if there were any additional problems. He said these recent arrests should serve as a reminder to those outside the country who criticize the NLD for not being more assertive that it takes very little to end up in prison.

17. (C) Comment: These arrests obviously serve as a warning that political activities are still very closely monitored and that any criticism of the regime will be dealt with harshly. The NLD continues to maintain a non-confrontational profile in hopes of demonstrating to the SPDC that it can and will play according to the regime's strict rules. It is a difficult line to hold given rapidly deteriorating socio-economic conditions, but the alternative would be a return to the confrontations, arrests, and attrition of NLD members in the 1990's.

18. (C) Comment Cont'd: One worrisome aspect of the February 13 SPDC information sheet is that it specifies that only the 10 legal parties may act freely. Most of the political parties in the opposition coalition group, the Committee Representing the Peoples' Parliament (CRPP), were deregistered by the regime after the 1990 elections and are not included in the 10 legal parties. Hopefully, the information sheet was not meant as a warning of possible arrests if these parties continue to participate in the CRPP.
End Comment.

McMullen